

POWDER DRIVING MELO.

BY MORGAN ROBERTSON.

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Six days thou shalt labor, and do all that thou art able.

And on the seventh thou shalt haulst the deck and scrape the cable.

When you have made a more than successful cruise, on which you have

the coast from Callao to the isthmus; when your hold is filled with the choicest of brandies, wines and liquors—with fancy groceries and the finest of silks, brocades and broad-

cloths, and the covers of four treasure-chests in the 'tween deck will hardly close over the contents; lastly, when

your number is reduced by lights, sickness and quarter-deck correction from 40 to 20, and your share in the

spoils is increased in like ratio, it is hard, very hard, to lie in the hammock under a hot Pacific sun and whistle for a

wind, with your island retreat just below the western horizon, a fat and

tempting Chinese junk a half-mile off in the same direction, a curious though

quiescent man-of-war three miles east, and Palm Tree Island to the southward,

toward which the current is setting, threatening to receive you in its shark-infested reef.

Such conditions would try the patience of gentler souls than Captain

Swarth and his crew. Their brig was taking in water through a started butt

—in spite of the thrummed topgallant sail under it—at the rate of a foot an

hour, while the one gang that they dared show to those inquisitive gops

aboard, the Chinese, was a motley crew of what was good of her crew, lead the

"bulldozers" a chase to the southward and dodge back to their island to ca-

reen and reef, divide up and rest. They knew that man-of-war—though she

did not seem to know them—knew her speed and gunnery, and feared her not

—with wind.

Yank Tate, the carpenter, sounded the pump-well and groaned a gentle

oath. "No good, capten," he said, as he walked aft with the sounding rod;

"must be up to the second tier now."

Captain Swarth swept the smoky horizon with his glasses. There was no

sign of even a catspaw; the motionless man-of-war—a gundek sloop—lay

outlined against the haze with the distinct detail of a steel engraving—every

block, rope and reef-point showing. Aboard the junk a big, fat Chinaman

sat at the tiller on the high poop, no

ding, as though asleep, while the rest of her crew were hidden. Palm Tree

Island was nearer—he could plainly hear the surf crashing on the barrier.

"Get the boys up, Angel," he said to his long-legged, solemn-faced mate, "Man both pumps; and Chips"—this to the carpenter—"see what you can do

with the lumber down below. Make a ballin' pump if you can."

"Then we'll have that feller's boats down on us," answered the mate, "and

lose the junk, too—they've got swabs aboard. Them rags won't fool the brass

buttons after they see our crowd." He pointed to a string of signal flags at

the gaff end, which, in answer to a previous inquiry of the signal, had given

the official number of the last brig they had taken—that now lay on the bottom

40 miles east. "Why not hold on till dark, Bill?" mumbled the mate, "and

try to make a dash for it before dawn."

"We'll likely have some more soon anyhow; they're only waiting till it's

cooler. As for the junk, let her go; there's not much in her. We've got to

doat, above all else, to get out of here. Can't get away when the wind does

come. We could be the boats off."

"Guess yer right, Bill. Pity we lost ours. We could be 'em with the junk

from this if we had 'em. Man the after pump," he called.

The carpenter had disappeared in the 'tween-deck, and the cosmopolitan crew

and thundering uproar were again hurled shoreward. Some caught a

momentary glimpse of the disappearing knuckles of the reef below, and a

dismasted junk just above; then the fog thickened, blotting out all the

punishing water and its deafening sound; then came again the nauseating

sinking, which told them the wave had passed; then a shock and a sound of

smashing wood. The brig had struck on the reef or within it.

But the dominant volume of sound was transferred from landward to sea-

ward, and, though they could see nothing now, they knew that the third

wave, as it crashed over the barrier, was the largest of all. Up the un-

sloped the half-filled brig traveled, the

caged wolves, they ate of the salt meat

hash prepared by the cook, after an

allowance of grog. Then Captain

Swarth, who had taken a little

excursion, imparted the information

that the junk lay above them in a

clearing, and, though dismasted, was

doubtless sound and tight, as her

rudder was intact and no holes could

be seen in her. In her was food of some

kind—rice, sago, curry fish, etc. Did

they want her? An inarticulate yell

answered. Cutlasses and boarding

pikes were handed out, and 22 men

climbered down the sides and started

to exterminate a junkful of Chi-

na-men.

Over fallen trunks and soggy banks,

through moist and tangled under-

growth, they picked their way up the

hill, and when they opened the clear-

ing, with the junk resting straight on

her flat bottom, they charged for her

sides with curses and veils.

But they came back, scalded by hot

water, bruised by stones flung from

primitive catapults, and choking from

the fumes of gas bombs thrown at

them, and looked, with their stream-

ing eyes cleared, at an array of sharp

spear heads along each rail, each of

which was more of promise than in the

best of their pikes and short cutlasses,

and behind each of them was a Chi-

na-man. The fat man they had seen nod-

ding at the tiller stood on the high

poop, and seemed to be in command.

"Melican man no hab come top side,"

he called; "Melican man no blon;

Chinaman blong fore side."

"Yo do he, yo yellow-skinned vil-

lars," cried Captain Swarth. "At 'em

again, boys. Don't breathe till you

get aboard."

The second charge was half-hearted

and futile; they did not breathe the

demoralizing fumes, but those heath-

ens were, unquestionably, fighters, and

with several of their number prodded

by the speed they withdrew.

"Why didn't ye give us pistols, cap-

ten," asked one as he rubbed the blood

from an ugly scratch in his cheek.

"Pewer's wet, you blasted fool,"

roared the infuriated captain; "all

there is that's dry is right here"—he

tapped his pistol—"and I'll use this,

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